

# What is Coronary Bypass Surgery?

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Coronary artery bypass surgery is a heart operation. It uses blood vessels to go around or "bypass" clogged coronary (heart) arteries. Now blood can flow through the new vessels to the heart muscle the way it should.

How do the arteries of your heart become clogged? Over time, fats, cholesterol and

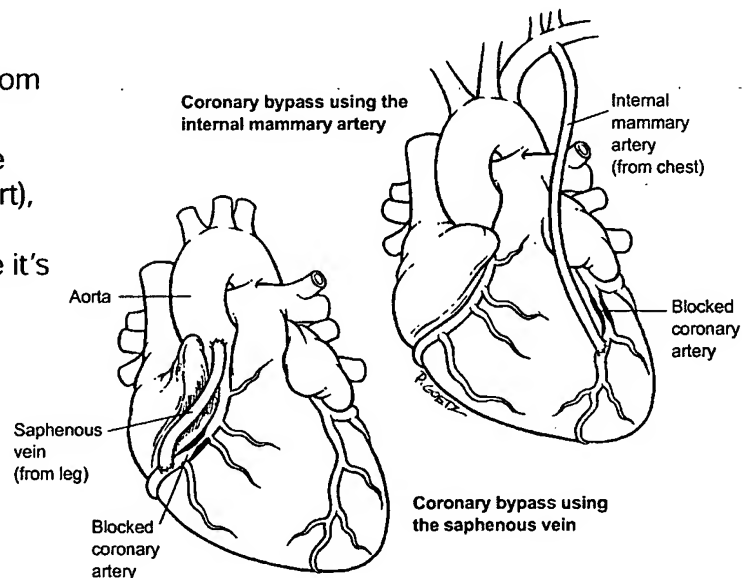
other substances can build up in the walls of your arteries to form a plaque. When the plaque breaks open and a blood clot forms, blood flow to your heart is blocked and can lead to chest discomfort called angina and to a heart attack.

More than half a million coronary bypass operations are performed each year.

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## How is it done?

- Your doctor will take a blood vessel from your chest or from your leg.
- One end is attached to your aorta (the large artery that comes out of the heart), and the other end is attached to the coronary artery below the point where it's clogged.
- Blood can now flow through the new channel to the heart.



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## What is surgery like?

- You will be asleep during the operation. It can take 3 to 6 hours.
  - After surgery, you go to an intensive care unit (ICU) for a few days.
  - Your family can visit you briefly in ICU.
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## What about after surgery?

- You'll wake up in ICU and may feel confused at first.
- It's busy in ICU and the lights are always on. It's normal to lose track of time.
- You'll have a tube in your mouth and throat to help you breathe. It's uncomfortable and you can't talk with it, but nurses will help you communicate.
- The breathing tube will stay in until you can breathe on your own — a few hours.
- You'll be hooked up to many tubes and wires.

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## What happens when I leave ICU?

- You'll move to a hospital room.
- You'll be sore.
- You may have night sweats.
- You may be given medicine.
- You must breathe deeply and cough hard to clear the fluids in your lungs.
- You'll start to move and walk around right away.
- You can eat normally and should feel better each day.

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## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
  2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
  3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).
- We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.
- Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

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## What are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack:

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke:

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

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## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

When will my chest heal?

When can I go back to work?

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### What Is Coronary Bypass Surgery?

Answers by Heart

Coronary artery bypass surgery is a heart operation. It uses blood vessels to go around or "bypass" clogged coronary (heart) arteries so blood can flow through the new vessels to the heart muscle the way it should. This information sheet provides answers to the following questions regarding coronary bypass surgery:

- How is it done?
- What is surgery like?
- What about after surgery?
- What happens when I leave ICU?

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